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GOD, COMMITMENT, AND OTHER FAITHS: PLURALISM VS. RELATIVISM

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This paper addresses the challenge of the problem of religious pluralism: how can we remain fully committed to our most basic truth-claims about God, and yet take full account of the claims of other world religious traditions? Six possible responses to this problem are delineated and assessed. Among the possible responses, certain strengths are identified in Inclusivism, though it is rejected. Focusing then on Religious Pluralism and Religious Relativism, these two views are extensively compared and contrasted. Finally, Christian Relativism is defended on the grounds that it best incorporates the strengths, without the salient weaknesses, of other possible responses to the conflicting truth-claims of the world religions.

Crises in religion historically precipitate revolutions in religious thought. Today, the impressive piety and evident rationality of the belief systems of *other* religious traditions, inescapably confronts Christians with a crisis—and a potential revolution. How should Christians respond responsibly to the conflicting claims of other faiths? More pointedly, should Christians abjure traditional claims to the one truth and the one way to salvation? As even Descartes (rather quaintly) observes in his *Discourse on Method*,

> . . . I further recognised in the course of my travels that all those whose sentiments are very contrary to ours are yet not necessarily barbarians or savages, but may be possessed of reason in as great or even a greater degree than ourselves. I also considered how very different the self-same man, identical in mind and spirit, may become, according as he is brought up from childhood amongst the French or Germans, or has passed his whole life amongst Chinese or cannibals.[1]

Religious beliefs, like many philosophical orientations, seem largely an accident of birth. If you are born in India, you are likely to be a Hindu; if born in France, you are likely to be a Christian. Moreover, on their own grounds, Buddhists and Muslims and adherents of other great religious faiths, seem rationally justified in their beliefs. This raises the *problem of religious pluralism*: the mutually conflicting systems of truth-claims of the world's religions, if taken separately, appear rationally justified—but are they *correct*? Is only one system of religious truth-claims

correct, is more than one system correct, or are all religious systems mistaken?

Descartes, concluding from the diversity of opinion which he observed that "it is much more custom and example that persuade us than any certain knowledge," attempts to arrive at a method for attaining certainty, despite the fact that "there is nothing imaginable so strange or so little credible that it has not been maintained by one philosopher or other."[2] Likewise, is there one correct religious system, and can we know what it is? Or is the search for universal or certain truth in religious matters as overambitious as Descartes was philosophically overly ambitious?

A major problem with the desire for a comforting certainty in religious matters is identified in Tillich's observation that the church has become all too insular: "theologians have become careless in safeguarding their idea of a personal God from slipping into 'henotheistic' mythology (the belief in *one* god who, however, remains particular and bound to a particular group)."[3] But if henotheism poses a danger on one side, a too ready acceptance of pluralism in religion poses a danger on the other side. For an uncritical pluralism undermines the strength of commitment of faith. How then can we both remain fully committed to our most basic truth-claims about God, and at the same time take full account of religious pluralism? Christians today must be responsive to other faiths, but responsive *within* the Christian vision expressed in the Vatican II Declaration *Nostra Aetate*: ". . . all peoples comprise a single community, and have a single origin . . . God . . . One also is their final goal: God."[4]

After explaining why the problem of religious pluralism is a problem of conflicting *truth*-claims, I will set out six possible responses, religious and non-religious, to the conflicting truth-claims of the world's religions. Then I will assess each response in turn from an external, religious (but not necessarily Christian) point of view, ultimately focusing on the Pluralist and Relativist responses. I will end by defending the Relativist response from an internal, Christian perspective, and explain how it incorporates strengths, without some of the salient weaknesses, of other possible responses to the conflicting truth-claims of the world religions.

I

In the *Dynamics of Faith*, Tillich suggests that "The conflict between religions is not a conflict between forms of belief, but it is a conflict between expressions of our ultimate concern . . . . All decisions of faith are existential, not theoretical, decisions."[5] It *would* be a gross distortion of faith to reduce it to merely theoretical concerns or to questions of belief. But in avoiding this intellectualist distortion of faith Tillich is mistaken to suggest that the conflict between religions is not a conflict between truth-claims. True, a religious way of life importantly involves such elements as ritual and symbols, and a moral ordering of one's life. But our beliefs, or more comprehensively, our world-views—i.e., the total cognitive

web of our interrelated concepts, beliefs, and processes of rational thought—determine the very nature of our ultimate concern. For all experience, understanding, and praxis—whether it concerns the mundane or the *mysterium tremendum*—is structured by our world-views. Consequently, conflicts between religious traditions fundamentally stem from conflicts of belief, conflicts over specific claims about how meaning and value are to be achieved, and what is the desired telos for humankind.

In assessing the conflict of truth-claims among world religions it must be kept in mind that a religion is not itself true or false any more than any other human institution such as art, government, or law, is in and of itself true or false. A total institution—aesthetic, political, legal, or religious—is only more or less expedient, only more or less effective in meeting its intended goals. What is true or false, and what is most fundamentally in conflict between such systems, are the underlying, specific truth-claims within the systems. Now, in the conflict of religious truth-claims, all of the world's major religions agree that the divine, or the Absolute, or the Real, is One, transcends the natural order, and is ultimately inexpressible. As *Ecclesiastes* puts it, God "has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end." (Eccles. 3:11, RSV) But though they have this general point of agreement, and though each religious tradition includes truth-claims and even scriptural material which is expendable, there is a fundamental or "vital core" of beliefs in each religion which is definitive of that very tradition.[6] And it is particular elements of this "vital core" of beliefs that are incompatible among world religions.

For instance, there is no intractable conflict between claims in the Muslim tradition that Mahdis will periodically appear to revive faith in God, and orthodox Christian claims that Jesus represents the final prophetic revelation of God. For Christians could come to accept, and Sunnis could come to reject, further prophetic revelations from God *via* Mahdis, without impugning the respective orthodox status of Jesus or Mohammed.[7] But traditionally it *is* essential to monotheistic traditions, like Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Ramanujan Hinduism, that the correct human perception of the divine is the perception of a personal deity. In contrast, on a Hinayana (Theravada) Buddhist view, God does not exist, and in much of the Hindu tradition, the notion of a personal deity is talk about an illusory state of affairs bound to this life. Or, to take another trenchant conflict among religious truth-claims, consider some of the diverse notions of the relation of humanity to Ultimate Reality. In Hinayana Buddhism there is no real question of one's relation to ultimate reality, for the goal of liberation is the complete extinction of the ego; in Islam the basic human relation to God is one of slave to master; in orthodox Judaism the central relation is one of a servant to his or her God.

Thus, because they make essentially different truth-claims, different religious traditions are structured by *essentially* different world-views, offering *essentially* different paths to what is perceived as Ultimate Reality. Since a person's world-view, then, is inherently constitutive of their religious way of life, the question is whether the differences in *truth-claims* among the world religions, and the consequent differences in the (putative) paths to Ultimate Reality, are significant or ultimately irrelevant.

We can also see that the conflict among the world religions is fundamentally a conflict of *truth-claims* if we consider the meaning of "faith" and of "religion." Faith is the more encompassing notion. Faith can be either religious or non-religious: we speak of faith in the progress of science or in the inevitableness of dialectical materialism, as much as of Christian or Muslim faith. Therefore, I will use the term "faith" to refer to a person's fundamental commitment to any world-view, a commitment which is a total dispositional state of the person involving affective, conative, and cognitive elements.

Religion, on the other hand, involves a particular form of faith, focused within a specific religious tradition. To distinguish religious from non-religious faith, I will define a religion or religious tradition as a set of symbols and rituals, myths and stories, concepts and truth-claims, which a community believes gives ultimate meaning to life, *via* its connection to a transcendent God or Ultimate Reality *beyond* the natural order. Thus religion is a *human* construct (or institution) which fundamentally involves beliefs at two levels: (I) it involves the meta-belief that the religion in question does indeed refer to a transcendent reality which gives meaning to life, and (II) it involves specific beliefs—including vital core beliefs—about the nature of that ultimate reality and the way in which it gives meaning to life. The first sort of belief, (I), is shared by the world religions. The second sort of belief, (II), is the point of conflict among the world religions.

II

There are six possible responses, religious and non-religious, to the conflicting truth-claims of vital core beliefs among the world religions:[8]

1. *Atheism*: all religions are mistaken.
2. *Religious Exclusivism*: only one world religion is correct, and all others are mistaken.
3. *Religious Inclusivism*: only one world religion is fully correct, but other world religions participate in or partially reveal some of the truth of the one correct religion.
4. *Religious Subjectivism*: each world religion is correct, and each is correct insofar as it is best for the individual who adheres to it.

5. *Religious Pluralism*: ultimately all world religions are correct, each offering a different, salvific path and partial perspective *vis-a-vis* the one Ultimate Reality.
6. *Religious Relativism*: at least one, and probably more than one, world religion is correct, and the correctness of a religion is relative to the world-view(s) of its community of adherents.

One obvious response to the conflicting truth-claims of the world's religions is the Atheist response, (1). Is it not most plausible, given the enormity of the conflict among truth-claims, that all religious traditions are simply false in different ways, rather than that one is correct, or that several are correct in different ways? In the absence of a generally acceptable deductive proof or inductive proof with a high probability, for the existence of God or the Absolute, there is no incontrovertible reply to this query. Indeed, there are important sociological and psychological arguments, like those of Feuerbach and Freud, which lend support to the Atheist response.

At stake here is the basic religious presupposition that only reference to a transcendent divine or ultimate reality gives ultimate meaning to human life. This meta-belief (I) is supported in the various religious traditions by appeals to religious experience, purported transformations of people's lives, the claimed necessity of a "leap of faith," and so on. These are internal considerations which will not, of course, prove that the Atheist response (1) must be mistaken. But in this discussion we can set aside the Atheist response if we take the basic religious meta-belief (I) as a presupposition.

Turning to the second response, Exclusivism in its strongest form is exemplified by the traditional Roman Catholic dogma, *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Exclusivism is the view that salvation can only be found either (as in the dogma just cited) inside a particular *institutional* structure, or on the basis of a specified tradition of religious beliefs, symbols, and rituals—e.g., as Karl Barth says of Christianity, "the Christian religion is true, because it has pleased God, who alone can be the judge in this matter, to affirm it to be the true religion."[9] But such unqualified Exclusivism seems untenable in the face of the problem of religious pluralism. In Ernst Troeltsch's words, regarding Christianity,

> a study of the non-Christian religions convinced me more and more that their naive claims to absolute validity are also genuinely such. I found Buddhism and Brahminism especially to be really humane and spiritual religions, capable of appealing in precisely the same way to the inner certitude and devotion of their followers as Christianity, . . .[10]

Principal considerations against Exclusivism within *any* religious tradition include the following: Historically, it is largely a matter of geographical accident

whether one grows up as a Hindu or Buddhist, Christian or Muslim, etc. Theologically, a strict reading of Exclusivism condemns the vast majority of humanity to perdition, which certainly appears contrary to the notion of a loving God, as well as seeming to contradict the idea of an Absolute which is the telos of all humankind. Ethically, Religious Exclusivism has the morally repugnant result of making those who have privileged knowledge, or who are intellectually astute, a religious elite, while penalizing those who happen to have no access to the putatively correct religious views, or who are incapable of advanced understanding. Sociologically, Exclusivism is a concomitant of sectarianism, serving as a rationale for enforcing discipline and communal cohesion.[11] Epistemologically, one could not *know* with certainty that there is only one correct set of religious truth-claims or only one institutional structure providing a path to salvation—a consideration exacerbated by the fact that all religions at some point make Exclusivist claims. And religiously, Exclusivism is highly presumptuous, ignoring the fact that religious truth-claims are human constructs, human attempts to know Ultimate Reality, subject to the limitations and fallibility of the human mind.

It is of course possible that the Exclusivism of some particular religious tradition is correct. But given these weighty considerations against Exclusivism, we must turn to responses (3) - (6), responses that hold that in some form each of the great world religions is at least in part correctly directed toward the divine or Absolute. The problem is how to avoid the serious moral, theological, empirical, and epistemological deficiencies of Exclusivism without dissipating the very cohesiveness and vitality of one's own religious tradition which Exclusivism properly seeks to protect.

III

A natural alternative to take to meet these concerns is Inclusivism. This has become an especially prominent view in Roman Catholic theology since Vatican II. Religious Inclusivists jointly hold two theses: That other religions convey part of the truth about Ultimate Reality and the relation of humanity to Ultimate Reality, but that only one's own tradition most fully provides an understanding of Ultimate Reality, and most adequately provides a path to salvation. Thus, *Nostra Aetate* states both that "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in [other] religions," and that the cross of Christ "is the sign of God's all-embracing love" and "the fountain from which every grace flows."[12]

From these foundations, Christian Inclusivism has been developed in considerable detail by Karl Rahner, who suggests that those in the non-Christian traditions can be "anonymous" Christians. Since, Rahner suggests, "we have to keep in mind . . . the necessity of Christian faith *and* the universal salvific will of

God's love and omnipotence,"

> we can only reconcile them by saying that somehow all men must be capable of being members of the Church; and this capacity must not be understood merely in the sense of an abstract and purely logical possibility, but as a real and historically concrete one.[13]

In the same vein, R. C. Zaehner offers an historical argument for Inclusivism:

> The drive towards the integration of . . . the personal and the collective, has been characteristic of the most original thinkers in [all religions] during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century . . . . This unity in diversity is the birthright of the Catholic Church . . . all the other religions, in their historical development, grow into 'other Catholic Churches' . . . [For while one God] is the inspiration of all religions and peculiar to none . . . The only religion that has from the beginning been both communal and individual is Christianity.[14]

Inclusivism is typically based on the notion that one's own religion most fully possesses a particular element which is most essential to religion. Zaehner looks to the integration of the personal and collective; Kant holds that true religiosity is identical to the moral life; Schleiermacher proposes that underlying genuine religion is "the feeling of absolute dependence"; Rudolph Otto emphasizes a numinous sense of the holy, a sense of the *mysterium tremendum*; *Nostra Aetate* declares that "from ancient times down to the present, there has existed among diverse peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human life"; and John Baillie suggests that all humans have a knowledge of God through a felt presence of the divine such that all people "already believe in him."[15]

That other religious traditions, in accordance with the religious meta-belief (I), might provide some apprehension of Ultimate Reality, is not at issue here. Rather, Inclusivism supposes that a *particular* sort of apprehension and understanding of Ultimate Reality is elemental to all religion. However, in the first place we could not *know* that all humans have the same sort of elemental apprehension of Ultimate Reality. Second, the empirical evidence supports precisely the opposite supposition. Even in the broadest terms, the notion of an elemental apprehension of Ultimate Reality is understood in *personal* terms in the monotheistic traditions, while it is *non-personal* in Confucianism and in Hindu and Buddhist traditions. And third, each religion tends to see itself as the culmination of *the* elemental apprehension of Ultimate Reality: "other religions can have their own fulfillment theology. Sri Aurobindo sees the world religious process converging on Mother India rather than the Cosmic Christ, and Sir Muhammad Iqbal sees it converging upon a kind of ideal Islam."[16]

So when Rahner, for example, says that the Christian has, "other things being equal, a still greater chance of salvation than someone who is merely an anonymous Christian,"[17] this can only be a statement of faith, not one of certain knowledge. Yet the strength of Inclusivism *is* this unequivocal faith—*within* an acceptance of other traditions—that one's own religion is salvific. Inclusivism expresses an appropriate religious disposition. But Inclusivism ultimately fails as a warranted epistemological thesis. This failure leads us to the pluralistic types of responses to the problem of religious pluralism.

IV

Subjectivism, Pluralism, and Relativism are all pluralistic responses to the conflicting truth-claims of world religions. All three views share a basic *idealist epistemology*: i.e., they share the basic assumption that the world we experience and understand is not the world independent of our perceiving but a world at least in part structured by our minds. Thus these pluralistic views share the epistemic view expressed in the Kantian dictum that "[sensible] intuitions without concepts are blind,"[18] a view sometimes expressed in the contemporary notion that all experiencing is experiencing-*as*. But further, they share the assumption that there is more than one set of human concepts—more than one world-view—which is valid for understanding the world. Thus they share the sort of *pluralist* epistemology expressed by William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*: "why in the name of common sense need we assume that only one . . . system of ideas can be true? The obvious outcome of our total experience is that the world can be handled according to many systems of ideas, . . ."[19] The three pluralistic religious responses all hold that one's perception of religious truth is in some sense relative to one's world-view. Typically this view is supported on the grounds of the ineluctable enculturation or the historicity of all thought and experience, or, as in the Whorf hypothesis, by suggesting a necessary connection between language, which varies from community to community, and truth, which consequently varies.

The most radical of the pluralistic responses to the conflicting truth-claims of the world religions is Subjectivism, where religious truth and salvation are literally as varied as individuals are diverse. As a general view in epistemology, subjectivism is a form of relativism about truth. It is the extreme epistemological position that truth is relative to each individual's idiosyncratic world-view. Thus, on a Religious Subjectivist's view, religion is a radically private affair, often understood as purely a matter of one's individual relation to the divine or Absolute. But subjectivism, and therefore Religious Subjectivism, is conceptually incoherent. Truth-bearers are statements or propositions. Statements or propositions are comprised of concepts. And precisely what Wittgenstein's "private-language" argument demonstrates is

that concepts are social constructions and cannot be purely private, individual understandings.[20] Thus, since statements and propositions are comprised of concepts, and concepts are social constructs, truth cannot be idiosyncratically individualistic. Religious Subjectivism, then, must be rejected.

The two remaining pluralistic views, Religious Pluralism and Religious Relativism, are often conflated. John Hick offers a concise description of Pluralism as the view that "There is not merely one way but a plurality of ways of salvation or liberation . . . taking place in different ways within the contexts of all the great religious traditions."[21] Pluralism holds that there is only one Ultimate Reality, but that Ultimate Reality is properly, though only partially, understood in different ways. Following a metaphor which Hick employs, just as the historian does not have direct access to figures of history, and consequently different historians develop different perspectives on historical figures like Genghis Khan or Sun Yat-Sen because of historians' different methods of inquiry, cultural backgrounds, etc., so too, different religious traditions or different theologies, not having direct access to the divine, offer different enculturated "images" of the one Ultimate Reality.[22] On the Pluralist account, there is no ultimate conflict between these different perspectives, since there still remains one set of truths, even if those truths are imperfectly and only partially understood within each perspective. Religious Pluralism, then, focuses on the viability of different religious *perspectives* on Ultimate Reality.

Religious Relativism, in contrast, is directly a thesis about differences of religious *truth-claims*. The Religious Relativist minimally holds the general epistemic view, which I shall designate as "conceptual relativism," that first-order truth-claims about reality—e.g., that persons or that subatomic particles or that God exists—are relative to the world-view of a particular society.[23] More precisely, a conceptual relativist definitively holds that, corresponding to differences of world-view, there are mutually incompatible, yet individually adequate, sets of conceptual-schema-relative truths.[24] Thus for the Religious Relativist, unlike the Pluralist, truth itself is relative and plural.

However, Religious Pluralism and Religious Relativism do share two underlying Kantian theses. They share the Kantian metaphysical division (though the Kantian terminology may not be employed) between noumena and phenomena, distinguishing between God in Himself or the Absolute in itself, and God or the Absolute as humanly experienced. And as we have seen, they share the Kantian epistemic notion that all experience, and so all religious experience, is structured by the (culturally and historically conditioned) world-view of the percipient. Thus, Religious Pluralism and Religious Relativism hold that differences of religious perception cannot just be treated as a matter of some people simply being wrong about the nature of the divine Reality, but rather that such differences of perception are inherent to religious perception and conception. Given these

points of fundamental agreement, which position, Pluralism or Relativism, better accounts for the conflicting truth-claims of the world religions?

V

An important exponent of Religious Pluralism is Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Cantwell Smith argues that the notions of "religion" and of "a religion" are obsolete.[25] He holds that only God and humanity are "givens"—global universals—and that the centrality given to religion is misguided and the conception of a religion as a belief system mistaken. Rather than starting from a particular religious tradition and then considering God and humanity, one should start from God and humanity and consider particular religious traditions from this global perspective. Smith reaches the Pluralist conclusion that the one truth about the religious life of humankind is conveyed in the various Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, and so on, forms.[26]

Quite correctly, I think, Smith is attempting to circumvent the obstacles which *religion* often places between humans and their response to the divine. But there are several problems with his approach. First, he suggests replacing the world-view(s) of particular religious traditions with another world-view on which it is presupposed that God and humanity are givens in the experience of all humans. This is neither a neutral world-view, nor one which will be shared by all religious persons. Many adherents of particular religious world-views would reject the generalized approach to the divine Cantwell Smith proposes as so amorphous that it fails to capture *their* religious beliefs. Second, Smith's position rests on the dubious thesis, which we have already addressed, that there *is* a universal, innate experience or conception of the divine. Smith himself effectively argues against *Christian* Exclusivism by asking: "how could one possibly know?" that only the Christian faith is correct.[27] But the same argument is equally applicable to Smith's own position: how could one possibly *know* that there is a global, innate apprehension or "givenness" of God and humanity? If anything, the evidence most strongly supports the conclusion that all humankind does not share the same innate concept or primal experience of Ultimate Reality, much less of the nature of God, or even of humanity, *per se*.

John Hick has developed another, rather impressive and comprehensive, Pluralist approach, in part by following out a key aspect of Cantwell Smith's work, *viz.* the rejection of the idea that a religion is fundamentally a set of beliefs. Proposing instead that religion definitively concerns "the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness,"[28] Hick essentially argues that the apparently conflicting truth-claims of the world's religions are, in the final analysis, irrelevant, and that the world religions can be reconciled, and the integrity of each preserved, through this more fundamental shared goal

of moving from self- to Reality-centeredness.

Hick explicitly employs the two Kantian theses underlying both Pluralism and Relativism. He employs the Kantian thesis that all experience is structured by the mind by suggesting that specific forms of religious awareness "are formed by the presence of the divine Reality, . . . coming to consciousness in terms of the different sets of religious concepts and structures of religious meaning that operate within the different religious traditions":[29] i.e., *as* divine *personae* (e.g., Yahweh, Allah, etc.) for theists and *as* divine *impersonae* (e.g., Brahman, the Dharma, the Tao, etc.) for non-theists.[30] Regarding the phenomenal/noumenal distinction, he supports the distinction between personal and non-personal divine phenomena and the Eternal noumenon, on the basis of what he takes to be strong inductive evidence from religious experience.[31] And indeed we do find consistent differentiation in the world religions between Ultimate Reality as we experience it and as it is in itself. There is the Hindu distinction between *saguna* Brahman and *nirguna* Brahman; the Jewish Cabalistic distinction between the God of the Bible and En Soph; and in the Christian tradition, Eckhart's distinction between God *qua* Trinity and the Godhead itself, and more recently, Tillich's notion of "the God above the God of theism," and so on.

Hick does allow for the logical possibility that only one religion might be correct, but he thinks that the overwhelming facts of religious diversity make Religious Pluralism the most plausible response to the conflicting truth-claims of world religions.[32] A comprehensive Religious Pluralism like Hick's fully confronts the diversity of religious truth-claims. As such, it is an admirable and helpful response to the challenge which these conflicting claims presents. But even so, Religious Pluralism has significant shortcomings.

VI

Religious Pluralism fails to adequately account for the necessary, central role of cognition in religious faith. Hick suggests that differences of belief among the world religions are

> of great philosophical importance as elements within our respective theories about the universe; but they are not of great *religious*, i.e. soteriological, importance. For different groups can hold incompatible sets of theories all of which constitute intellectual frameworks within which the process of salvation/liberation can proceed.[33]

Of course, even incompatible theories can serve as guides to the same religious goal. But from this it neither follows that systems of belief and theory are irrelevant to guiding one to that goal, nor that it is unimportant which *particular* belief system one holds for reaching that end. Rather, the cognitive content of

religious faith is essential for providing a coherent and sufficiently comprehensive view of reality as a basis for purposive action and an effective, directive guide to "salvation/liberation." Further, the *specific* cognitive content of one's faith is of paramount importance since it is precisely what delimits one's *specific* path to salvation/liberation. And the specific path to salvation/liberation is not just a means to an end but is itself an integral part of the goal of salvation/liberation. This is expressed in the New Testament in the idea that the Kingdom of God is not future but begins in the lives of those who enter the new covenant now: "asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom was coming, he [Jesus] answered them, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; . . . the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.'" (Luke 17:20-21, RSV) Consequently, since the specific path to salvation/liberation is itself part of that very salvation/liberation, a specific religious world-view is importantly constitutive of what makes a way of life a (particular) *religious* way of life.

Indeed, it would seem that specific religious cognitive content is essential to making it meaningful even to be committed at all to a religious way of life. True, de-emphasizing specific doctrines—such as the idea that the Christ-event is the definitive self-revelation of the divine—makes it easier to reconcile apparently conflicting religious truth-claims, especially the notion of a personal God with the notion of a non-personal Absolute. But the more such specific doctrines are set aside, the more questionable it becomes whether a *religious*, as opposed to a non-religious, commitment is what gives life ultimate significance. Insofar as the specificity of religious doctrines is de-emphasized, the basic religious meta-belief (I) that religion does indeed refer to a transcendent Reality which gives meaning to life becomes less plausible. The plausibility of (I) rests in large part on the evidence of religious experience. But as any hypothesis about the nature of reality is made more indefinite, the available inductive evidence to support that hypothesis is not increased, as for example Hick's defense of Religious Pluralism seems to suggest, but decreased. For, evidence for an indefinite hypothesis is correspondingly indefinite or ambiguous.

Another difficulty with Religious Pluralism is this. Exactly what a recognition of pluralism in general seems to acknowledge is that humans, and human conceptions, fundamentally differ. But then, to the extent that the differences of human conception embedded in the world religions are regarded as inconsequential, the dignity of the individual and the value of each distinct community of faith is lessened.

To see how this applies to Christianity, consider Maurice Wiles' observation that, "there are two fundamental characteristics of the conception of God . . . it must be a profoundly personal concept, . . . And secondly it is God in relation to us with which we have to do."[34] The Christian understanding that the universe is under the providence of a God who has revealed Himself as a personal

being—One who understands and loves humanity—is and must be a conception of God as He manifests Himself *to us*. Yet this conception of an essentially *personal* God is not incidental but central to both corporate and individual Christian faith. Hick attempts to account for this by suggesting that among the world religions the Real is experienced as *either* personal or non-personal.[35] While this Religious Pluralist view properly acknowledges that theistic understanding is an understanding of Ultimate Reality not *an sich* but *as* it confronts us in history, it obviates the significance of the Christian understanding of a personal God as *somehow* correctly revealing the nature of Ultimate Reality in itself. A personal reality might have non-personal aspects, but it could not be identical to something which is non-personal. Hence, this Pluralist account entails that the monotheist's experience of a *personal* divine reality *cannot*, to that extent, correctly represent the nature of the Real in itself.

Finally, Religious Pluralism is deficient insofar as it unintentionally undermines the sense of the reality of God. It is part of the fundamental meta-belief (I) of religion that the God or the Absolute of which humans speak is real and not a metaphysical illusion or psychological delusion. But if the God of which monotheists speak is only an "image," only a perspective on an unknowable, noumenal reality, then the God of history will not be a real God. I will address this last point more fully below.

These deficiencies must be met if a pluralistic resolution to the conflicting truth-claims of the world religions is to be successful. Yet despite these shortcomings, Religious Pluralism has an obvious strength which must be retained for any successful pluralistic resolution. Religious Pluralism offers a reconciliation of the disparate world religious traditions which avoids the theologically unacceptable and epistemically unsupportable religious imperialism which we find in Exclusivism, and even in Inclusivism.

VII

If, then, we reject the religious imperialism of the Exclusivist and Inclusivist views that one's own tradition must be either the sole or at least the fullest arbiter of truth about the divine, we have two choices about how to deal with the irreducible plurality of religious conception and experience. We can either take the approach of Pluralism, treat the incompatible beliefs among differing religious world-views as ultimately inessential, and conclude that the great world religions simply offer different perspectives on Ultimate Reality. Or we can accept the doctrines which adherents of different world religions so ardently profess and passionately follow as *essential* to their faith. I have suggested that the former approach runs the danger of undermining the basic religious meta-belief (I), and reducing the substance of religious world-views to vacuity, obviating just those

differences in the path to salvation/liberation which give significance to each individual religious tradition. If I am right about this, we are led to conclude that different religions have different constitutive sets of truth-claims, and that—while these sets of core truth-claims are mutually incompatible—each set of truth-claims is probably adequate in itself.

This is the Religious Relativist response to the problem of religious pluralism.[36] Granted, the different religious world-views among the world's great religious traditions are complementary insofar as they have a commonality in the religious experiences and perceptions of humankind. But different religious world-views are, ultimately, irreducibly plural, with features that are incompatible if not contradictory *vis-a-vis* other religious world-views. Further, corresponding to each distinct religious world-view, there is a different set of possible religious *experiences*. For what can be experienced depends on what *can be* real or unreal, and what can be real—i.e., what is possible—is determined by the percipient's world-view.[37] This means that each distinct religious world-view delineates a distinct possible divine reality[38]—though just to the extent that religious world-views "overlap," characteristics of these distinct possible divine realities will overlap.

For instance, monotheistic truth-claims will be most directly about God *as* humans experience Him, for they are most directly about divine reality *relative to* a particular theistic world-view. But then each theology, as a product of human constructive reasoning, will delimit only one *possible* divine reality. There will be other *contrasting*—though not totally mutually exclusive—valid theologies, held by other sincere women and men of faith, delimiting other possible divine phenomenal realities.

Importantly, on this Religious Relativist account, "The" God of history, delimited by the strictures of a particular theology is *not*, if He exists,[39] somehow unreal *vis-a-vis* the noumenal. God *qua* noumenal lies "behind," so to speak, the possible plurality of real phenomenal divine realities, delimited by different monotheistic world-views. But noumenal and phenomenal reality are two different categories of reality. And just as there is nothing unreal about nuclear weapons or pains or piano concertos because they are part of phenomenal reality, "The" God of history, "The" God one confronts, is not less real, if He exists, just because He is not in the category of the noumenal. What could be *more* real than that which we do experience? And to try to transcend our experience for something putatively "untainted" by human thought is not only the worst sort of degenerate Platonism, it is to turn away from the means we *do* have in experience for understanding the divine and our own humanity in relation to the divine.

Among the possible responses to the problem of religious pluralism, this Religious Relativist account of a possible plurality of phenomenal divine realities

seems to offer the best explanation of the differing experiences and incompatible conceptions of the great religious traditions. The Atheist response to the problem of religious pluralism is ruled out if we presuppose the religious meta-belief (I). Religious Exclusivism is neither tolerable nor any longer intellectually honest in the context of our contemporary knowledge of other faiths. Religious Subjectivism is conceptually incoherent. Religious Inclusivism does not go far enough toward solving the problem of religious pluralism. And Religious Pluralism has serious deficiencies which Religious Relativism avoids.

First, Religious Relativism reasserts the central role which cognition has in a religious life. The path to salvation is itself part of the salvific process. And one's religious world-view, as a guide for attitudes and actions, is inseparable from that path. Moreover, if all experience is conceptualized, then one will quite literally not be able to have any experience of the divine without a world-view which, e.g., enables one to experience the world *as* under the providence of God, or *as* an environment for working out one's *Karma*, etc. But then, as Religious Relativism asserts, *specific* truth-claims are essential to a religious tradition and way of life, and the conflict among the claims of the world religions cannot be resolved by de-emphasizing those conflicting claims.

Second, it follows from this that Religious Relativism treats adherents of each religious tradition with fullest dignity. Regarding Christianity, we could say, as the Pluralist must, that the doctrine of the Incarnation cannot be taken literally and cannot mean for *any* Christian that Jesus uniquely manifests the presence of God.[40] Or, we can allow that on *some* world-views this would be a perfectly rational view, delineating a world where Jesus *is* the definitive self-manifestation of God. Ironically, we fall back into a certain measure of the old absolutism that undergirds Exclusivism if we take the inflexible, even though Pluralist, first course. In contrast, Relativism not only allows with Pluralism that the world's great religions could have the same telos, it allows for the likelihood that more than one of the conflicting sets of *specific* truth-claims, which adherents of the differing world religions themselves regard as vital to their faith, is correct.

Third, that it is essential for the direct object of theological conception to be a *real* God seems to leave a Pluralist view like Hick's caught between two problematic options. As in his earlier work, the God of theology can be characterized as an "image" of God. But then the God of theology does not have the ontological status of an existent entity with causal properties in the phenomenal world. This will unintentionally reduce the sense of the reality of God, for what theology would then be most directly referring to would not be *God*, but a human *idea* of the noumenal. So to speak about *God*, would be to speak about something noumenal about which we can only know that we do not know its true character. In contrast, on Religious Relativism the God of theology can be a *real* God, not just a conception of or perspective on the divine. God *qua* phenomenal is not

just, in Tillich's phrase, "a symbol for God."

On the other hand, the Pluralist might hold, as Hick does in his more recent work,[41] that the divine phenomena just *are* the divine noumenon *as* experienced by humans via their particular religio-cultural perspectives. While this does indicate a more substantive ontological status for divine personae and impersonae, it threatens to collapse the phenomena/noumena distinction and runs counter to the basic idealist epistemology which underlies both Pluralism and Relativism. First, this suggests that the divine noumenon is itself experienced. One can postulate an unexperienced divine noumenon, and one can talk about divine phenomena which are (putatively) experienced. But this cannot amount to talk about the same thing—even if in different ways—for that would effectively be to eliminate the divine noumenon. And given an idealist epistemology, one cannot claim that the divine noumenon *is* experienced insofar as it appears to us in various ways, *even though* we cannot characterize the noumenal. For the conceptualization of all experience implies that what we experience can, in principle, be characterized.

Second, that a particular divine phenomenon somehow manifests the divine noumenon is a matter of faith. And while it could be a matter of reasonable faith for an individual to claim that the divine phenomenon which *they* experience somehow manifests Ultimate Reality in itself, it would not make sense to say that it was a matter of one's *faith* that the various divine phenomena, which adherents of all the great world religions feel that they experience, all *do* manifest Ultimate Reality. Rather this would amount to a hypothesis or theory about the world religions. And I do not see how we could know that this hypothesis is true; how could we know that the divine phenomena of all the great world religions *are* (or most probably are) the divine noumenon *as* experienced by humans? One's faith warrants one's own religious commitment; it cannot warrant the mutually conflicting commitments of others.

In contrast, on a Religious Relativist account, what is putatively experienced is not the noumenal Ultimate Reality, but e.g., the *real* God of history. Now, I do think that it is a mistake to suppose that one can *know* that specific claims which we make about phenomenal divine reality are also true of the divine noumenon, since this would obviate the very point of the noumena/phenomena distinction. But I think it is perfectly sensible to make the bare claim that there *is* a noumenal—*whatever* its character—which, so to speak, "lies behind" the phenomenal reality which we experience. Presumably there is no one-to-one correspondence between phenomena and noumena and hence no *direct* check from our successes and failures to the nature of the noumenal. But the greater the correspondence between our conception of the phenomenal and the character of the noumenal (whatever it is), the more our purposive activity, carried out within phenomenal reality as *we* understand it, will be successful and the closer—

in principle—our understanding of the phenomenal will correspond to the noumenal.[42] For the monotheist it is a matter of faith that, in this manner, one's *own* experience of the presence of "The" God of history does increase, on the whole, one's understanding of God in Himself.

VIII

One obvious point of resistance to this Religious Relativist account is the notion that there may be more than one phenomenal reality, and more than one phenomenal divine reality. But this notion initially seems strange only because we are used to thinking in terms of that one possible world which *we* regard as *the* (unique) actual world. Commonly, we treat any other conception of the actual world as simply false or mistaken. But if one accepts the idea that phenomenal reality is relative to a world-view, and that therefore there is a plurality of actual worlds corresponding to the plurality of distinct world-views, that does not undermine or alter what *we* call the actual world—i.e., the world delimited by *our* schemas.

Recognizing that others might be responding to a different phenomenal God is like recognizing that others might rationally claim to discern a cyclical recurrence of events in history where you discern none. One can accept that there *could* be states of affairs which others but not you experience, without thereby committing yourself to the existence of any *particular* such state of affairs.[43] To have faith in only one real (phenomenal) God is to say that for *oneself* there is only one real God who lives and moves and has His being; for others there may be other real entities which are "The" God of *their* history. But just as any actual event or state of affairs is by definition an event or state of affairs in *your* actual world, any actual event which you acknowledge as an act of God is an act of the real God who confronts *you* within (your) history.

IX

Frank Whaling raises another possible objection to both Pluralism and Relativism. Whaling argues that these views avoid "the necessity of theological ordering of any sort," and that they have "the appearance of being a somewhat abstract exercise in the theology of religion, rather than a summing-up of where the Christian community around the world actually *is*."[44] The second, descriptive point, that Christians do not currently tend to be Religious Pluralists or Relativists, misses the question of whether Christians *ought* to move toward Pluralism or Relativism in the face of the challenge of the conflicting truth-claims of the world religions. But with respect to the first point, it *would* be a serious defect of any pluralistic response to the world religions if diverse religious truth-claims

cannot be compared and assessed. Here Pluralism and Relativism offer two quite different approaches.

Pluralists most naturally approach the apparently conflicting truth-claims of world religions from the perspective of a "global theology."[45] That is, the Pluralist fundamentally attempts to look at religious traditions from an external, or inclusive point of view.[46] But the unavoidable historicity and the inherent enculturation of our thought obviate the very possibility of being able to assume this purported global perspective. There can be no such thing as a "neutral" or "objective" perspective in either religious or non-religious matters. Hence, any attempt to assess other faiths from a genuinely global perspective is inherently impossible.

Religious Relativism, on the other hand, avoids this difficulty by suggesting an internal approach to assessing other faiths. Relativism, more fundamentally than Pluralism, recognizes the inextricably socio-historical conditioning of one's perspective, and hence fundamentally recognizes that judgments about *other* faiths will necessarily be made from the point of view of one's *own* faith. This is simply to acknowledge an inherent condition of the human mind, and does not entail falling back into the religious imperialism we found in Exclusivism and Inclusivism. For there are general meta-criteria that can be applied across world-views to assess the acceptability of a world-view. These criteria include the internal coherence of a world-view, its comprehensiveness, thoroughness of explanation (e.g., that it does not depend on ad hoc hypotheses), the efficaciousness of the world-view in producing its intended end, considerations of parsimony, and so on. Thus Relativism, while not attempting to assume the stance of an impossible "neutral" global theology, can employ these meta-criteria to assess other faiths and so meet Whaling's objection. Further, this gives Relativism a strength that we observed in Religious Inclusivism. Religious Relativism, while recognizing that salvation *could* come to others in other traditions, supports the strength of commitment to one's own tradition.

X

While the Pluralist attempts to solve the problem of religious pluralism by setting aside conflicting truth-claims and emphasizing a universality and unity to all religions, the Religious Relativist can resolve the problem of religious pluralism by accepting these conflicting truth-claims as an appropriate manifestation of divine/human interaction. In the spirit of the Leibnizian notion that not just the quantity of good, but the *variety* of good things makes this "the best of all possible worlds"—the world that a good God would create—we *should* expect correct religious beliefs and veridical religious experiences to be as richly varied as human needs and human individuality. Contrary to the Pluralist conception, an ultimate uniformity of the central elements of all religious traditions is not

an ultimate value. Where Pluralism tends to homogenize religion, if one believes that God indeed has providence over the world, then precisely what the evidence of the world we find ourselves in indicates is that a diversity of religious truth-claims is intrinsically valuable, and divinely valued. Rather than a problem to be solved, the conflicting truth-claims of the great religious traditions, and even conflicting systems *within* traditions, can be accepted as a profound indication of God's manifest love and delight in the diverse worlds of His creatures.

That our religious beliefs have a correlation to the transcendent divine reality is a matter of faith. Since our perception and understanding are ineluctably limited to our world-view, even if what we believe is true about God *qua* phenomenal turns out to be true also of God *qua* noumenal, we could never *know* that that was so. We cannot *know* that we possess the requisite conceptual resources to apply to God in Himself, or *know* that we have formed ideas which are true of God *qua* noumenal, or *know* that our ideas do properly refer to the noumenal God. But just because we cannot know these things to be true *vis-a-vis* the noumenal God, this clearly does not entail that they are not the case. I do not see how it could be shown that it is *impossible* that our concepts or beliefs do in fact correctly refer to the noumenal. Quite the contrary, it is a matter of reasonable faith that Christian religious experience and theological conception *do* provide the basis for proper reference and proper talk about God in Himself. Yet to acknowledge that we cannot transcend our world-views, and that they in turn are inescapably structured by our limiting socio-historical perspective, is to recognize the fundamental fallibility and finitude of even our noblest conceptions and highest values. There is thus a religiously appropriate humbleness which Religious Relativism brings to our claims to religious truth.

Faced with the inescapable challenge of the claims of other faiths, it may now be time for Christians to move toward a Christian Relativism. A Christian Relativism would combine the strengths of Exclusivism and Inclusivism, and of Pluralism, without their respective disadvantages. A Christian Relativism would enable us to say, on the one hand, that salvation through Christ is definitive, without committing us, on the other hand, to the unsupportable view that salvation is exclusively Christian. A Christian Relativism would sustain Christian commitment and support Christian claims to truth, without claiming to be the only truth.[47]

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NOTES

1. Rene Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason*, in *The Philosophical*

Works of Descartes, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane & G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), vol. 1, p. 90.

2. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, pp. 91 and 90.

3. Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 91.

4. *Nostra Aetate* ("Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions"), in *The Documents of Vatican II* (America Press, 1966), pp. 660-61.

5. Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1958), p. 66.

6. On this point see R. C. Zaehner, "Religious Truth," in *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions: Conflicting Truth-Claims*, ed. John Hick (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 3.

7. Just as Muslims could accept or reject Mohammed Ahmad—of Khartoum fame during his theocratic state of 1882-1898—as a genuine Mahdi, without impugning the central role of Mohammed.

8. Raimundo Panikkar offers a similar list of possible responses in "Religious Pluralism: The Metaphysical Challenge," (in *Religious Pluralism*, ed. Leroy S. Rouner [Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984], p. 98), but he does not clearly distinguish and analyze Pluralism vs. Relativism.

9. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), I/2, p. 350.

10. Ernst Troeltsch, "The Place of Christianity Among the World Religions," in *Christian Thought: Its History and Applications*, ed. Baron R. Hugel (New York: Meridian Books, Living Age Books, 1957), p. 52.

11. For an excellent analysis of the role of Exclusivism within Christianity to achieve and preserve unity within an emerging sect, see Jean Runzo, *Communal Discipline in the Early Anabaptist Communities of Switzerland, South and Central Germany, Austria, and Moravia 1525-1550* (Ann Arbor, Michigan and London, England: University Microfilms International, 1978).

12. *Nostra Aetate*, in *Documents of Vatican II*, pp. 662 and 667.

13. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vols. 1-20 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd; New York: Seabury Press, 1961-84), vol. 6, p. 391.

14. Zaehner, "Religious Truth," pp. 18 and 17.

15. John Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 255.

16. Frank Whaling, *Christian Theology and World Religions: A Global Approach* (Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1986), p. 87.

17. Rahner, *Investigations*, vol. 5, p. 132.

18. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. 93.

19. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Random House, The Modern Library, 1902), p. 120.

20. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edition, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Co., 1953), I. 268 b.

21. John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p. 34.

22. John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), p. 96.

23. Another form of relativism, epistemological relativism, holds that *second-order* meta-logical or meta-linguistic claims about what sorts of statements could be true or meaningful are only relative truths. This form of relativism seems to engender the paradoxical if not self-stultifying view that *all*

truth is relative. Conceptual relativism about first-order truth does not in itself lead to this problem. I discuss this in *Reason, Relativism and God* (London: Macmillan, and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), pp. 38-41 and 45-48.

24. For an extended analysis of conceptual relativism see *Reason, Relativism and God*, ch. 2, especially pages 35-50. In contrast to subjectivism, on conceptual relativism world-views are largely societal constructs, and so different individuals can share the same world-view, or possess overlapping world-views.

25. See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

26. See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "A History of Religion in the Singular," in *Towards a World Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), pp. 3-20.

27. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Religious Diversity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 16.

28. John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, p. 29.

29. Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, p. 41.

30. Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 42-43. See also *God Has Many Names*, p. 59.

31. See Hick, *God Has Many Names*, p. 91.

32. Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, p. 99.

33. Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 93-94.

34. Maurice Wiles, *Faith and the Mystery of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 120. Other examples suggested by Raimundo Panikkar of religion-specific truth-claims which are essential to a religion and make the world religions irreducibly plural are the sense of historical consciousness in Christianity and the notion of *Karma* in various Asian religions. See "Religious Pluralism: The Metaphysical Challenge."

35. Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 39-44.

36. Though he refers to his own position as "pluralism," I take Panikkar's view to be a form of Religious Relativism when he says that "If we take religious pluralism seriously we cannot avoid asserting that truth itself is pluralistic" and that "being itself is pluralistic." ("Religious Pluralism: The Metaphysical Challenge," pp. 111-12.)

37. On the relativity of reality to world-views, see e.g., W. V. O. Quine, "Ontological Relativity" and "On What There Is," in, respectively, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969) and *From a Logical Point of View* (New York: Harper and Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1953). On the relativity of thinghood, see Nicholas Rescher, *Conceptual Idealism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), p. 108.

38. On this view of the relativity of reality to world-views and the consequent notion that there is more than one divine reality corresponding to the plurality of distinct religious world-views see *Reason, Relativism and God*, pp. 59-62 and pp. 238-42. For related views on the idea that reality is relative and that there is more than one actual world, see Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), e.g., pp. 20-21, and for an analysis of this notion as it applies to the sciences, see Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2nd ed., 1970), e.g., pp. 109 and 116.

39. A world-view only delimits what is possible; it does not determine what is the case. A monotheist's world-view only delimits what God qua phenomenal could be. Whether that God actually exists, and what His nature actually is within what it could be, are further matters, independent of the

world-view.

40. See Hick, *God Has Many Names*, p. 58 and *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 34-35.

41. See e.g., Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, p. 98.

42. Three conditions must be met for reference to God *qua* noumenal to be possible: (1) One must possess the requisite conceptual resources (whatever they are) to have concepts which *are* applicable to the noumenal, (2) one (subsequently) must actually form ideas which *are* literally true of the noumenal, and (3) there must be an appropriate causal connection between one's ideas and the noumenal, so that one's truth-claims *in fact* refer to the intended noumenal entity. In *Reason, Relativism and God* I argue that condition (3) can be met if the term used to designate the noumenal—in this case "God"—is used as a rigid designator (see pp. 246-53).

43. Also notice, to acknowledge that there may be other realities which are incompatible with your actual world does not mean that you are accepting incompatibilities *within* your world.

44. Whaling, *Christian Theology and World Religions*, pp. 95 and 98.

45. "While there cannot be a world religion, there can be approaches to a world theology. . . . a global theology would consist of theories or hypotheses designed to interpret the religious experience of mankind as it occurs not only within Christianity but also within the other great streams of religious life, . . ." (John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, p. 21.)

46. For example, this is explicit in Hick's essay, "On Grading Religions," *Religious Studies*, vol. XVII (1982), reprinted in *Problems of Religious Pluralism*.

47. I am grateful to William Alston and John Hick for helpful comments which made this a better paper, and to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a Summer Stipend Fellowship which supported my work on this topic.